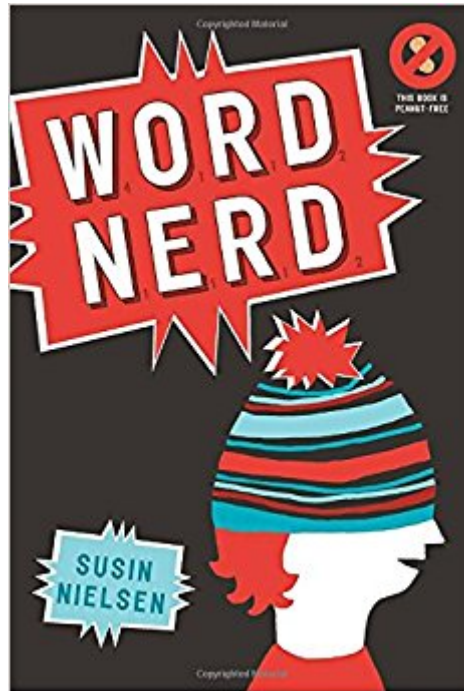




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Word Nerd



Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Ambrose is a glass-half-full kind of guy. A self-described “friendless nerd,” he moves from place to place every couple of years with his overprotective mother, Irene. When some bullies at his new school almost kill him by slipping a peanut into his sandwich even though they know he has a deadly allergy • Ambrose is philosophical. Irene, however, is not and decides that Ambrose will be home-schooled. Alone in the evenings when Irene goes to work, Ambrose pesters Cosmo, the twenty-five-year-old son of the Greek landlords who live upstairs. Cosmo has just been released from jail for breaking and entering to support a drug habit. Quite by accident, Ambrose discovers that they share a love of Scrabble and coerces Cosmo into taking him to the West Side Scrabble Club, where Cosmo falls for Amanda, the club director. Posing as Ambrose’s Big Brother to impress her, Cosmo is motivated to take Ambrose to the weekly meetings and to give him lessons in self-defense. Cosmo, Amanda, and Ambrose soon form an unlikely alliance and, for the first time in his life, Ambrose blossoms. The characters at the Scrabble Club come to embrace Ambrose for who he is and for their shared love of words. There’s only one problem: Irene has no idea what Ambrose is up to. In this brilliantly observed novel, author Susin Nielsen transports the reader to the world of competitive Scrabble as seen from the honest yet funny viewpoint of a boy who’s searching for acceptance and for a place to call home. From the Hardcover edition.

Book Information

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Life > Boys & Men

Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 5
• Twelve-year-old Ambrose Bukowski and his widowed, overprotective mother, an adjunct professor, move frequently. When he almost dies after he bites into a peanut that bullies put in his sandwich, just to see if he is really allergic, Irene has had enough, and she decides to homeschool him. While she teaches at night, Ambrose gets to know 25-year-old-Cosmo, recently released from jail and the son of the Bukowskis' warmhearted Greek landlords who live upstairs. Ambrose discovers that he and his neighbor both love Scrabble, so, without his mother's knowledge, he talks Cosmo into taking him to a Scrabble Club. For the first time, Ambrose has a friend, but when his mother finds out, she starts packing up to move again to get him away from the ex-con. This prompts Ambrose to run away, determined to get his mother to listen to him. Ambrose is a neat kid who is comfortable in his own skin, despite always being an outsider. Cosmo knows he made some wrong choices, but he is regretful, as well as caring and thoughtful, and a great morale booster for Ambrose. This is a tender, often funny story with some really interesting characters. It will appeal to word nerds, but even more to anyone who has ever longed for acceptance or had to fight unreasonable parental restrictions.
• Shannon Seglin, Patrick Henry Library, Vienna, VA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“This is a tender, often funny story with some really interesting characters. It will appeal to word nerds, but even more to anyone who has ever longed for acceptance or had to fight unreasonable parental restrictions.
• Starred Review from School Library Journal
[a beautifully drawn character]. [a] funny, wry tale, a tale that involves a lot of Scrabble (at the championship level), the reformation of an ex-con/druggie and the coming-into-himself of a boy. And there's a bit of love, too, actually.
• The Globe and Mail
From the Hardcover edition.

I read this to my class. It started out interesting but never really went anywhere. There were a few times where the author attempted to think like a teenage boy and referred to the bodies of young women Ambrose meant, but it didn't ring true. The story didn't need it.

This book by far exceeded my expectations. It is real literature with wonderful lessons about acceptance, independence and not being afraid to be yourself. My rising 6th grader loved it.

Word Nerd by Susin Nielsen
Ambrose Bukowski is a twelve-year-old social misfit. He has food allergies; he wears "uncool" clothing (his sneakers are Ikes, a cheap imitation of Nikes); he has no friends. He and his overprotective widowed mother, Irene, live in a dreary basement rental in Vancouver, where they have moved so Irene can work teaching "sessionals" to mediocre college students. Three school bullies torture Ambrose on a daily basis. When Ambrose almost dies at school from a "prank" the bullies play on him, his mother switches him to home schooling, requiring him to spend much of his time at the apartment alone. At the same time, the family upstairs, a Greek couple named Mr. and Mrs. Economopoulos, welcomes back from jail their twenty-five-year-old son Cosmo, who tells Ambrose he was jailed for "killing a boy...who asked too many stupid questions." An improbable friendship develops between Ambrose and Cosmo when they discover their mutual interest in SCRABBLE®. Ambrose finds a flyer advertising the West Side Scrabble Club and convinces Cosmo to drive him there--very much against Irene's rules. The SCRABBLE® club helps Ambrose gain confidence and self-esteem, and Cosmo gets support from Amanda, the beautiful director, in his efforts to find a better life after a rough start as a drug addict and thief. Author Susin Nielsen has done her homework. Her descriptions of the West Side Scrabble Club and its annual tournament, where Ambrose and Cosmo compete, offer a warm look at the many types of people one meets at clubs and tournaments. Ambrose, initially intimidated by the players and then boastful when he wins, learns sensitivity to others--and a good list of helpful words. He finds in the SCRABBLE® community a welcome he never received at school. A cute touch is that each chapter begins with an anagram of the actual title, followed by words that can be made using those letters. Initial caps starting each chapter are inside bonus-point-shaped squares. In many ways the book reminded me of Nick Hornsby's excellent novel *About a Boy*, in which the friendship between a shallow womanizer and an awkward preteen boy with a difficult home life transforms them both. While *Word Nerd* is definitely aimed at the young adult audience, it is a nice read for all ages--particularly SCRABBLE® players. As a coach of middle-school players, I understood Ambrose's emotions as he went from kitchen player to tournament player, gaining confidence and pride. I only wish that most SCRABBLE® clubs didn't meet so late in the evening--it's tough for younger players to attend. In the acknowledgments the author thanks the Vancouver SCRABBLE® Club for letting her attend--and credits Stefan Fatsis's *Word*

Freak for attracting her to SCRABBLE™. I am grateful she chose SCRABBLE™ as the background for this coming-of-age story--and I hope that the story not only appeals to today's Youth SCRABBLE™ Players, but also may attract other young players to the club and tournament scene. Word Nerd by Susin Nielsen is available at bookstores and at .com.

It was Gucci dab Cosmo smokes big weed The boy has a dumb name dab dab dab dab dab dab

I love misfit stories... Here are a couple of misfits who need each other. I enjoyed this a lot! Fun book.

A YA story of a lonely kid who becomes deeply involved in playing Scrabble competitively. Through this, he becomes less lonely, develops various friendships, and more...a very enjoyable read for kids and adults alike! Not only that, but this will build a person's vocabulary, especially if a Scrabble aficionado!

Great book for reluctant reader or child in transition, builds confidence and self esteem. Great book for middle schooler.

As a grade 7/8 teacher, I found this was a book that really engaged my students, but had the right balance of humour, etc. that allowed me to actually enjoy it, as well!

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